

June 11, 2004

Honorable George Radanovich
Chairman
Majority Office of the Subcommittee
On National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
H2-187 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to your committee regarding the views of the Mayor and Municipal Council of the City of Taunton, Massachusetts concerning H.R. 2129. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the historic areas and buildings within Taunton for potential inclusion within the National Park System.

As the Mayor of Taunton, I strongly support a study to include historic areas and buildings of Taunton within the National Park System. Taunton's history of equality, patriotism, commerce and innovation make the areas ideal candidates for inclusion within the National Park System. Our location within the region, proximity to other National Park System locations, and unique and untold facets of our history are all persuasive grounds to support this study.

The area to be included within the study includes the Church Green Historic District, which includes the Church Green National Register District, Main Street, and the Taunton Green National Register District. The area in question is home to many historic buildings. Among these are the Taunton City Hall, the First Parish Church, the Old Colony Historical Museum, the Leonard, Morton and Union Blocks and the Superior Court building. The area in question is contiguous and conducive to tours and other educational opportunities. Located in the very heart of Southeastern Massachusetts at the intersection of major highways, Taunton would be an ideal location for inclusion within the Nation Park System as this action would reunite our two major National Register Districts that contain architectural, historical and educational treasures that are important to our community, our commonwealth and our country.

FROM COLONY TO NATION: A WALK DOWN MAIN STREET

"Dux Femina Facti"

The cultural, religious, educational and governmental heart of historic Taunton is Church Green. Church Green was the site of the first meeting house in Taunton after its founding. Among the original settlers of Taunton, Elizabeth Pole is credited as being the first female to found a community in America. Her legacy is preserved at the Old Colony

Historical Society Museum on Church Green. In addition, a 16th century door from the Pole ancestral home in England is on display at the First Parish Church on Church Green. Church Green is also the site of the negotiations and the signing of an agreement between the puritans and King Philip of the Wampanoags in 1671.

The role that Elizabeth Pole, a woman, played in founding Taunton is an important aspect of our colonial history that should be emphasized as part of the study. The National Park System has devoted many resources to the role of women in our nation and history. However, no other site presently in the National Park System matches the unique circumstances surrounding Ms. Pole and her role as a pioneering colonial female. The phrase “Dux femina facti” which translates into “the person responsible for the deed or accomplishment was a woman” adorns the Seal of the City of Taunton.

“Liberty & Union”

In the early 1700's, as Taunton became the County Seat for Bristol County and a leading community within the Commonwealth, Taunton's leaders and its people took a leading role in creating a new nation. A statue of Robert Treat Paine symbolically faces away from the Church Green National Registered District down Main Street towards the Taunton Green National Registered District. With the transformation from English colony towards independent nation, the center of the city moved towards the Taunton Green.

Robert Treat Paine, a Taunton resident, was as a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He along with John Adams served as members of the First Continental Congress in 1774. Paine and Adams' careers were linked again as Paine served as an Associate Prosecutor at the trial of the Boston Massacre. Paine went on to become the first Attorney General of Massachusetts and was a member of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. While serving in the Continental Congress in October of 1774, Paine was not party to the historic event that occurred near his home when the Sons of Liberty raised the “Liberty & Union” or “Taunton Flag” on October 21, 1774 over Taunton Green on a 112 foot Liberty Pole. The Liberty and Union flag that still flies over the Taunton Green is recognized as the first flag of open defiance to the crown

In addition to Robert Treat Paine, Taunton's General David Cobb left his mark on the Revolutionary War. General Cobb served as aide-de-camp to General Washington and was entrusted with the duty of negotiating the evacuation of New York. After the war, General Cobb served as Judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Bristol County and was instrumental in preventing bloodshed in Bristol County during Shay's Rebellion.

As such, the history of the revolutionary war as symbolized by Robert Treat Paine, General Cobb, the Sons of Liberty and the Taunton Green are an important component of the study. The distance down Main Street from Church Green to Taunton Green past the homes of Paine and Cobb and Elizabeth Pole to the Liberty & Union Flag are symbolic of our transformation from colony to independent nation.

“Commerce, Architecture and Innovation”

With the birth of the nation secure, Taunton became a vibrant center of commerce, trade and innovation. Dating back to the colonial era, products from Taunton were utilized throughout the colonies. The anchor for the U.S.S. Constitution was forged in Taunton, as was the anchor for the Civil War's Monitor. The Taunton River served as a catalyst for industry and trade. At one point, Taunton was one of the busiest inland ports on the Atlantic coast.

However, the prime industry throughout Taunton history has been silver. To this day Taunton is known by many as the “Silver City.” As with Taunton's political, cultural and religious legacy, the silver industry was born on Main Street, between Church Green and Taunton Green. In 1824, Isaac Babbitt invented and manufactured a new alloy that resulted in pewter ware of a greater quality than ever before manufactured. Two employees, Henry G. Reed and Charles E. Barton went on to found Reed & Barton, one of the oldest privately held companies in the nation and set a standard of excellence known throughout the world. The standards established by Reed & Barton are evident to this day; in 1994 Reed & Barton was selected to produce all of the victory medals for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games.

In addition to the rich commercial history that developed in the 19th century, Taunton Green is home to a number of historically architectural structures. The most impressive is the Superior Court House that is located on the Taunton Green. The Romanesque style structure is complemented by a landscape designed by Fredrick Law Olmstead, whose home is part of the National Park System in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Therefore, a compelling component for inclusion within the study would be Taunton's manufacturing past and how the innovations and industry of Taunton have helped shape our nation's economy and history to the present day. Similarly, our unique New England “downtown” deserves inclusion within the system so that we are afforded the necessary tools to protect one of the remaining vestiges of our architectural history.

CONCLUSION

It is my opinion that Taunton is a perfect candidate for inclusion within the National Park System. Beginning at Church Green, proceeding up Main Street and ending at Taunton Green, visitors, students, and all who appreciate America's history, culture and ethic will participate in a truly American story. Founded by a woman, critical in the fight for independence and innovative in its approach to commerce, industry and trade, Taunton symbolizes the strengths of our nation: courage, equality, liberty and industry. The story of our nation can be summarized on so many levels by including Taunton within the National Park System: *“From Colony to Nation: A walk down Main Street.”*

I am convinced that a study by the Secretary of the Interior will result in a finding that Taunton is most worthy of the inclusion within the National Park System.

I thank you for the opportunity that you have afforded the city and me.

Regards,

Robert G. Nunes
Mayor